

Chapter 5

Evaluative Comparison of the Presentations of Self-Identification in the Two Media

In writing **Fight Club**, Palahniuk makes it complex and confusing to emphasize the protagonist's mental instability. The film, however, is under cinematic constraints especially it has to be comprehensible within a time limit, while keeping the same effect. On this point, an author may have more freedom to create his works than a director does. The film director especially the one who works on an adapted novel faces several limitations: to be faithful to the original work while interpreting it in his own way. He is usually prone to be criticized on whether his production is better or worse than the original text. Moreover, the director has to consider many factors: audience, time, and budget. In making a novel-based film, the director, therefore, has to be very careful in choosing the scenes and key details in the novel in order to impress the viewers in about two hours. The presentation of self-identification in each media has already been analyzed in the previous chapters. In chapter 3, the protagonist's identity crisis, his self-identification process and literary techniques are explored while the film chapter focuses only on how film techniques are employed to present self-identification as the similar major messages need not be repeated. For this chapter, the overall comparison and evaluation of effect in the two media will be examined. In the film **Fight Club**, there are four ways of adapting the original text: maintaining the original essence, elaborating, adding, changing, and omitting some details.

Maintaining the Original Essence

Since the director keeps most of the novel; the film **Fight Club** does not change the writer's theme and the messages. Self-identification is still the theme of the film. The narrator's identity crisis and his self-identification process follow those of the novel. Fincher keeps the scenes relating to self-identification in the film: the narrator's insomnia, his consumption behavior which gives him false identity, meeting Bob who cures the narrator's insomnia, creating his split personality, inventing fight club, establishing Project Mayhem, canceling Project Mayhem and eliminating Tyler. Most of literary techniques: plot and structure, point of view, characterization, symbolism, black humor, irony and surrealism, appear in the film as well. Like the opening scene in the novel, the film begins with the threatening sequences on Parker Morris Building. It is also told through the narrator's point of view with lots of flashbacks. The main characters: the nameless narrator, Tyler Durden, Marla Singer, Bob and the narrator's boss still play the important roles in the film as in the novel. Moreover, Fincher does not change the appearance of any characters. They look like the descriptions Palahniuk gives to each character in the book. The important symbols: iced cave, the penguin, space monkeys, are still seen in the film.

Fincher realizes that surrealistic techniques work much better in the film with several kinds of film means. Camera movement and continuity editing simultaneously create black humor and surrealism, for instance. As a result, his product turns out to be a striking adapted film which retains the essential points and at the same time, putting his creation into the film as well.

Elaboration and Addition

The director elaborates some details that Palahniuk forgets or ignores. This method overlaps with adding some significant details. He elaborates the

relationship between the narrator and his dark side, Tyler. In the book, Palahniuk gives the readers clues that the narrator's shadow through some sentences. For example, "Tyler has been around for a long time before we met" (Palahniuk, 1996:32), but he does not give the readers exact information about where Tyler has been before the narrator meets him. In the film, Fincher does not ignore this sentence because he realizes that this sentence supports the dark side's attempt to emerge. He elaborates this key sentence into several scenes that make the story more lucid and comprehensible. In the film version, the director allows the spectators to see the development of the narrator's shadow. Although the narrator himself does not let the audience know that he is fighting with his dark side, the audience is able to understand his fighting with his shadow through the use of subliminal scenes to show Tyler's appearance before they meet. Tyler appears in a flash many times before meeting the narrator because he wants to offer the narrator some help but the latter denies. Notably, Tyler stops appearing in a flash after the narrator accepts Tyler's help and lets him control his life. Both media, however, has one thing in common: the readers may not be able to notice the repeated sentences that hint at the emergence of the narrator's shadow while the viewers hardly notice the subliminal scenes unless they carefully see the film. While the hints in the novel are easier to notice than in the film, the use of subliminal scenes, however, reinforces the emergence of the narrator's dark side which is more vivid than it is presented in the novel.

Another sentence in the book that hints that Tyler is the narrator's dark shadow is "Tyler's words coming out of my mouth..." (98,155). The author makes use of this sentence or similar ones to allow the readers to see Tyler's power over the narrator at the hospital scene :

...At the hospital, Tyler tells them I fell down.

Sometimes, Tyler speaks for me.

I did this to myself (52).

The readers may not notice the significance of this sentence in their first reading. But in the film, there are some scenes that the narrator speaks after Tyler. When the narrator goes to see the doctor to have his face stitched, Tyler is seen at the background and tells the narrator that he fell down the stairs :

Jack (v.o) : Sometimes Tyler spoke for me.

Tyler : He fell down some stairs.

The nurse doesn't look at Tyler, just keeps tending Jack.

Jack : I fell down some stairs. (Uhl,1999 : II, 41)

There are few sentences that mention Tyler's words coming out of the narrator's mouth and the director does not overlook this scene. He makes a point of keeping it to emphasize the narrator's dark side. Yet, he rearranges the original conversation to make scene more logical. Instead of saying that Tyler tells the nurse that he falls down first, the director makes the narrator says that Tyler speaks for him first and then tells the audience what he says to the nurse. Moreover, film techniques give the director advantages to make this shot more comprehensible. Taken in a medium shot, the narrator appears in the emergency room lying on the bed while Tyler, blurred, appears at the left corner at the back saying : "He fell down some stairs" (II, 41). The nurse cannot hear Tyler because he is just the narrator's imaginary friend or his split personality. Nobody else except himself can see Tyler. The director employs the short focal length to make Tyler exaggeratedly seems farther at the back, and at the same time, reinforce Tyler's inance over the narrator. As seen, although Tyler is not the main focus in this shot, he is portrayed as being able to make the narrator say what he wants him to say.

Another clever elaboration is in the treatment of the narrator's relationship with Marla. In the novel, the narrator says that he dreams of having sex with Marla and then he wakes up: "All night long, I dreamed I was humping Marla

Singer” (II,56), and then continues to talk about what he was dreaming. The readers may literally think that he just dreams and do not relate this to the narrator’s dark side. The viewers may assume that this man is Tyler. Fincher wants to surprise the spectators by deceiving them to misunderstand that Tyler is another main character and it is Tyler who has sex with Marla. The film techniques of making a blurred scene in which Marla has sexual intercourse with Tyler gives unclear view of the face of the man whom she wants to have sex with. Fincher does not reveal the man’s face because he wants to keep the audience from knowing the truth until the story comes to the end. Almost at the end of film, the director reveals that the narrator does not dream of having sex with Marla, but it happens in reality. Then, Fincher employs the flashback to make the narrator think about it again but reveals the face of the man having sex with Marla: it is the narrator’s face not Tyler’s. These scenes reinforce the narrator’s dark side.

Furthermore, Fincher elaborates the scene that the narrator regrets not going to see Marla after she calls him: “What’s worse is this is all my fault” (II, 60). Due to his mistakes, Tyler goes to see and rescue her and eventually sleeps with her which makes the narrator unhappy. In the book, the narrator says that Tyler tells him how he goes to rescue Marla : “Tyler tells me how Marla lives in room 8G, on the top floor of the regent hotel....Tyler gets to the end of the hallway and even before he knocks a thin, thin, buttermilk sallow arms and slingshots out of the door of room 8G, grabs his wrist, and yanks Tyler inside” (II, 60). In the film, Fincher uses a flashback to reveal what happens after the narrator lets Marla talk to herself on the phone. This way the viewers see Tyler come to pick up the phone and go to help her.

Besides, Fincher develops the scene that the narrator meets Tyler at the bar. In the novel, Palahniuk does not pay much attention to this scene. He does not tell the readers what they are talking about in the bar. He just tells the readers that they decide to meet at the bar. And after they leave the bar, Tyler asks the narrator to hit him and then go to live with Tyler. That is all Palahniuk allows the readers to know.

By contrast, Fincher lets the audience see what the narrator and Tyler are talking about in the bar. The audience are able to know Tyler's characteristics more. Here, Tyler is talking to the narrator about consumerism:

Jack : There's always that. I don't know, it's just... when you buy furniture, you tell yourself : that's it, that's the last sofa I'm gonna need.

No matter what happens, I've got that sofa problems handled. I had it all. I had a stereo that was very decent, a wardrobe that was getting very respectable. I was so close to being complete.

Tyler : Shit, man, now it's all gone.

Jack : All gone.

Tyler : Do you know what a duvet is?

Jack : Comforter.

Tyler : It's a blanket, just a blanket. Now why guy like you and I know what a Duvet is? Is this essential to our survival? In the hunter-gathered sense of the word? No. What are we then? (I, 26)

The director uses this scene to introduce more of Tyler's points of view and to make the sharp contrast between the narrator and Tyler. Fincher also employs this opportunity to satirize the consumer culture through Tyler's speech. The director allows the viewers to see their complete difference: the narrator is a victim of consumerism whereas Tyler opposes it. In the novel, the readers only know from the narration that the narrator wants to buy various kinds of furniture from catalogues. They have to use their imagination along with the narration to figure out how materialistic the narrator is. On the contrary, Fincher presents this scene through the surrealistic techniques which gives vivid pictures. The audience see each piece of furniture with its description and price underneath exactly like those in the catalogue quickly filling the narrator's empty room. This scene from the film clearly shows that

the narrator as a real materialist, a victim of consumer culture who pays attention to the commodities rather than exploring his mind. He identifies himself with all the goods he buys. He believes that those materials will fulfill his life. In fact, he is still not happy although he has what he wants because he still cannot find his self-identity.

To keep the readers perplexed, Palahniuk intentionally makes the narrator say whatever he wants to confuse the readers. The narrator lets the readers decipher the story by themselves. He talks about Bob back and forth without reminding the readers that he is going to change the subject as mentioned in the third chapter. Fincher is, however, aware of the chronology. He makes the narrator directly alert the viewers to what he is telling about his past : “No, wait. Back up. Let me start earlier” (I, 2). At least the viewers are aware of what they will confront in the few minutes. Straightening certain chronological order is, thus, an important elaboration that enables the audience to follow the film.

Another prominent means in adapting this novel into a film in is adding some important details so that the viewers will understand the story more clearly. For example, the opening scene in the novel is plain. The author does not prepare the readers for the confusion and complication that will follow. The beginning of the story, in fact, already starts with confusion. The readers can find it hard to understand the text. Yet, the first impression they have may not encourage them to read **Fight Club** further. Consequently, some readers can miss the interesting and striking issues and messages beneath the complication. On the contrary, Fincher pays very careful attention to the opening sequences. He prepares the viewers for the complication and confusion that will happen in the story by adding strange and striking opening sequences. Even before taking the viewers to see the narrator on the top floor of the Parker Morris Building, the director takes them into a hollow object that the audience do not recognize. In the DVD script, the opening sequences are called “Fear Center”. The audience can figure out only after the camera takes them out of the hollow object

to see the narrator's face that what they have seen is the inside of the narrator's brain while he is frightened.

Moreover, Fincher uses the low-key lighting to create the dark atmosphere on the top of the Parker Morris building, but does not introduce the man who is threatening the narrator in the first scene. Although the narrator says: "people are always asking me if I know Tyler Durden (I, 1), the audience do not realize that Tyler is the man who is putting the gun into the narrator's mouth. In the opening sequences, Tyler is only seen at the back with the medium shot. Notably, Tyler is associated with darkness since the beginning. It is probably Fincher's intention to keep this man a mystery because he wants to arouse the viewers' curiosity. Comparing to the opening scene in the book, the opening sequences keep the viewers' attention and perplex them for quite a while until they see what it is. If he chooses the same opening scene to open the film, it would not be interesting because there is nothing to capture audience's interest.

Another addition found in the film is the conversation scene after they are leaving the bar. Tyler makes the narrator ask him for a place to stay :

Jack : (looks at his watch) Oh, God, it's late. Hey thanks for the beer.

Tyler : Yeah, man.

Jack : I should find a hotel...

Tyler : What?

Jack : What?

Tyler : A hotel?

Jack : Yeah.

Tyler : Just ask it, man.

Jack : What are you talking about?

Tyler : Three pitches of beer can you still can't ask.

Jack : What?

Tyler : You call me so you could have a place to stay.

Jack : Hey, no, no,no - -

Tyler : Yes, you did. Just ask. Cut the foreplay and just ask, man.

Jack : Wou- - Would that be a problem?

Tyler : Is it a problem for you to ask?

Jack : Can I stay at your place?

Tyler : (indifferently) Yeah.

Jack : Thanks

Tyler : But. I want you to do me one favor.

Jack : Yeah sure.

Tyler : (talking very fast)

Jack : I want you to hit me as hard as you can. (I, 26-28)

Asking Tyler for a place to stay is like a ceremony in which the narrator lets Tyler in and start to control his life. In the novel, however, Tyler only lets the narrator stay at his house without saying anything except asking the narrator to do him a favor which is the beginning of **Fight Club**: “Tyler and I, we met and drank a lot of beer, and Tyler said, yes, I could move in with him, but I would have to do him a favor...There, drunk in a bar where no one was watching and no one would care, I asked Tyler what he wanted me to do. Tyler said, “I want you to hit me as hard as you can” (46).

Besides adding conversations, shots to enliven the narrator’s shadow are added. Even though some of the narrator’s split personality scenes are presented in the book, they are not enough in Fincher’s points of view. The director’s additions of this point can be found in several places. Sometimes the narrator speaks after Tyler such as in the scene in which Tyler is downstairs while the narrator is arguing with Marla. Tyler tells the narrator what to say:

Tyler : (whisper) This conversation...

Jack : This conversation...

Tyler : ...is over.

Jack : ... is over. (III, 80)

Marla cannot see Tyler who is downstairs. She asks the narrator who he is talking to. It is clear in this scene that, Tyler plays the important roles in the narrator's life. He decides for the narrator what to do and say. This added scene is very appropriate because it gives a sharp picture of Tyler's dominance over the narrator who can control neither himself nor his dark side.

The protagonist's invisibility is another important issue on which Palahniuk focuses. As a name is very significant in identifying oneself and embodies one's existence, the protagonist shows his lack of identity as he never gives his real name to anyone. Moreover, he puts on different fake name tags when he attends the support groups : "I never give my real name at support groups" (19). Fincher also pays attention to this point and adds some more scenes that reinforce the narrator's nonexistence. The narrator does not write down his name when he exchanges the number with Marla: "It doesn't have your name. Who are you? Cornelius? Rupert? Travis? Anyone of the stupid names you give each night" (I,16) The narrator's nonexistence and Marla's existence is sharply contrasted. The narrator never reveals his real name to assure his existence while Marla puts on her real name every time she attends the support groups or when she writes down her number to the narrator. Fincher adds one more scene of the narrator's nonexistence in the film. When Tyler calls him back and the narrator tells Tyler who he is. The narrator says that he is the clever guy Tyler met on the plane instead of telling him his real name :

Tyler : Who's this?

Jack : Um...We met on the plane. We had the same briefcase. I'm...the clever Guy. (I, 25).

In addition, Fincher employs several kinds of film techniques to make **Fight Club** more vivid because they have what the literary techniques do not and cannot do: visual techniques to create the mood in each scene. The director has to interpret the original text first so that he/she will be able to utilize the right kinds of film techniques. For **Fight Club**, several kinds of film techniques are employed to bring the written words into life. Lighting which creates the dark atmosphere associated with the narrator's dark side as well as kinds of shots reveal the narrator's various emotions the atmosphere.

Changes

Fincher mainly changes two aspects : characters and situation. He changes the person the narrator blackmails from the hotel manager to his boss. This scene is not really outstanding in the novel but the blackmailing sequences turn out to be one of the most striking sequences of this film. This scene is not remarkable at all in the book because the two men do not have a close relationship :

The manager of the Pressman Hotel very gently took the receivers out of my hand. The manager said he didn't want me working here anymore, not the way I looked now...And without flinching, still looking at the manager, I roundhouse the fist at the centrifugal force end of my arm and slam fresh cracked scabs in my nose (116).

Unlike the novel, the narrator of the film blackmails his boss and his fighting against himself is a very hilarious sequence in the film. The person the narrator blackmails, that is, the boss is a more sensible choice since he has a closer relationship with him. He has to do whatever his boss orders although he sometimes does not want to. Consequently, the boss can be considered an important cause of his depression. It is, therefore, reasonable to blackmail his boss :

Jack : We need to talk.

Boss : Okay. Where to begin? With your constant absenteeism?...

Jack punches himself in the nose. He falls to the floor. Blood starts to trickle.

Boss drops the phone on the floor...(III, 70-71)

Another example of changing the characters is in the car crash sequence. Fincher changes the driver from the mechanic to Tyler. In the novel, the narrator does not seem to be frightened by the mechanic's crazy drive. He sits quietly and the mechanic only talks to the Project Mayhem members who sit at the backseat :

The mechanic yells into the wind, "You're not your problems." A space monkey in the back seat picks it up : You're not your problems...

Here, the mechanic swerves us into the oncoming lane, filling the car with the headlight through the windshield, cool as ducking jabs. One car and then another comes at us head-on screaming its horn and the mechanic swerves just enough to miss each one. (143)

It is not reasonable why the narrator is not frightened at all. Since the narrator does not seem to enjoy running wild and the mechanic's driving may lead him to a car accident and finally death, he should be anxious or panic. As Fincher probably does not want to complicate the story by having too many important characters in the film, he changes

insignificant or irrelevant character to those directly relating to the narrator. At this point in the film, the mechanic is the one who brings Tyler the car and Tyler is the one who drives the car instead. The novel does not tell why it has to be the mechanic who drives the car. But in the film, the viewers have no question why Tyler is the one who drives the car because they already know that Tyler and the narrator are very close. This change gives a dramatic effect : the narrator, in the film, is very frightened with Tyler's crazy drive and has an argument with Tyler. He is displeased at what Tyler is doing. In the novel, the mechanic says something and the members say after as if the mechanic were the leader. This can confuse the reader since the mechanic has never appeared before. In the film, Fincher wants to reinforce the narrator's dark side. Here, Tyler has so much power over the narrator that the narrator cannot control him.

Another change is in the scene of threatening Raymond Kay Hessel. Here, Fincher changes the person who threatens Raymond from the narrator to Tyler. In the novel, the narrator himself threatens Raymond :

Raymond Hessel closed both eyes so I pressed the gun hard against his temple so that he would always feels it pressing right there and I was beside him and this was his life and he could be dead at any moment...

.....

This is what Tyler wants me to do.

These are Tyler's words coming out of my mouth,

I'm Tyler's mouth.

I'm Tyler's hands. (151-155)

Here, the narrator's dark side is clearly seen particularly when he says that what he has done is because of Tyler and what he has said is from Tyler's mouth. As seen, the narrator is under his dark side's control. In the film, Tyler is the one who threatens Raymond but with the gun without bullets. The narrator is standing there but he

disagrees with Tyler at first. After seeing that there are no bullets in the gun, he admires Tyler's action :

Jack : Come on, this isn't funny! What the fuck was the point of that?

Tyler : Tomorrow will be the most beautiful day in Raymond K.

Hessel's life. His breakfast will taste better than any meal you
and I have ever tested.

Tyler throws the gun back to Jack and walk away.

Jack : (V.O) : You had to give it to him.

Tyler : Come on.

Jack : He had a plan. And it started to make sense in Tyler sort of way.

No fear. No distractions.

Jack pulls the trigger --- CLICK. EMPTY. (III, 77)

From this sequence, the viewers may not realize that Tyler is the same person with the narrator but they might think Tyler is another crucial character who the narrator admires. Although Palahniuk and Fincher have the same intention, that is, to present the narrator's dark side in both media, the presentation of this blackmailing scene in the novel is more logical and reasonable. The split personality is obviously presented through the quotation before last. If the readers pay close attention to these sentences, they will figure out that Tyler is the narrator's split personality. Palahniuk, however, sometimes does not emphasize Tyler's dominance. For example, in the novel, one of the space monkeys quotes Tyler's words and thus makes the point less powerful :

When I come home, one space monkey is reading to the assembled space monkeys who sit covering the whole first floor. "You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic

matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile.

(134)

It is probably the author's intention to undermine Tyler's dominance and distract the readers' attention from recognizing that Tyler is the narrator's dark side. On the other hand, he may forget or overlook this scene. By contrast, Fincher does not make this scene perplex. He underlines Tyler's power by demonstrating Tyler's influence on the space monkeys, as Tyler announces these words himself to the space monkeys which is much more convincing and powerful because he is the leader and the one who invents Project Mayhem. Fincher makes Tyler announce his wisdom twice. He separates Tyler's motto of one scene in the book and puts it into two scenes in the film. As a result, it is apparently seen that those space monkeys are brainwashed by Tyler's catchphrases over and over again:

Tyler : Listen up, maggots. You are not a beautiful or unique
snowflake. We are the same decaying organic matter as
everyone else.

.....

Tyler : We are all singing, all-dancing crap of the world. We are all
part from the same compost heap. (III, 22)

Moreover, some details about the narrator and Tyler's first meeting are unclear. The narrator in the novel confuses the readers of where he first meets Tyler. He says he first meets Tyler on the nude beach and then the other time he says he first meets Tyler on the plane. Unlike Palahniuk, Fincher decides to choose the setting on the plane for their first meeting. Since the narrator mostly spends his time on the plane, it is more reasonable to make him meet Tyler for the first time there. The director makes Tyler's firstly full appearance look mysterious and stunning to both the narrator

and the viewers with his conversation with the narrator and his facial and figure movements. His added conversation with the narrator indicates the sharp contrast between these two characters. On the plane, Tyler also criticizes the airline safety card and tells the narrator the real purpose of this card:

Tyler : You know why they put oxygen masks on the planes?

Jack : So you can breathe.

Tyler : Oxygen, gets you high. In a catastrophic emergency, we're taking giant, panicked breaths... Suddenly you become euphoric, docile, you accept your fate.

Tyler points to the passive faces on the drawn figures, from the INSTRUCTION CARD.

Tyler : Emergency water landing, 600 miles per hour. Blank faces – calm as Hindu cows. (I, 20)

Fincher creates the black humor through Tyler's speech. What makes this film more remarkable than many other films is that the clever and satirical conversation that often made by Tyler, a rebel whose self-identification process is found through the attempt of breaking free from the history that has brainwashed people for ages. Fincher dares to present the ordinary things in a negative way – in the way that most people may not have realized before. Consequently, an unexpected, often horrible view of an ordinary thing or opinion creates black humor in this film. Although some details that Fincher changes from the novel may distort certain points that Palahniuk wants to convey such as in the threatening Raymond scene, most of the altered scenes are very effective because they mostly emphasize the narrator's shadow and reduce the confusion in the story.

Omission

The last type of adaptation employed in this film is cutting some details. Fincher cuts some scenes that are unimportant and or seen irrelevant. In the novel, it is not clear where the narrator meets Tyler. Sometimes he says he first meets Tyler on the plane. Some other time, he says he first meets him at the nude beach. Fincher does not want to let the little details confuse the audience. He, therefore, does not mention the nude beach and decides to make the narrator first meets Tyler on the plane.

The presentation of self-identification of **Fight Club** in the film is more effective than the novel since it brings the readers' imagination into vivid pictures. It is also regarded as one of splendid adapted films since it contains the novel's main theme and crucial literary techniques. Fincher is faithful to the original work. At the same time, he does not forget to put his own imagination and interpretation in the film which makes it different from the book. He knows well which scenes and sequences should be maintained, elaborated and added, changed or omitted. The author, however, does a great job in creating such a surprising work like **Fight Club**. Although the original text confuses the readers with some insignificant details, it is full of hilarious, thought-provoking and satirical points that stun the readers and make them realize the situations in the twentieth century. The novel also gives more details about all the characters especially the main ones so that the readers are able to fathom their problems more clearly than in the film.